

## A Charter of rights for hospital patients: putting the patient first

Item Type	Report
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Rights	DOH
Download date	09/05/2020 08:19:40
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10147/46391">http://hdl.handle.net/10147/46391</a>

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## FOREWORD

All of us at some time or other come in contact with the hospital services. Generally, the quality of care and treatment we receive and the level of commitment and professionalism of staff in our hospitals are of the highest standard.



Even so, there is always room for improvement. In an era of increasing specialisation and high technology, coupled with rising demands on our hospital system, there is a danger that the human face of medicine may be lost and that the personal and emotional needs of patients may be overlooked.

The Government is firmly committed to raising standards in our hospitals and to guaranteeing that everybody, irrespective of income, will have access to high quality medical care.

My objectives in publishing this Charter are to ensure that the health service becomes more responsive to the needs of individual patients and that there is a code of practice available which sets out what patients have a right to expect when they make use of hospital services.

Essentially, this Charter is about *putting the patient first*.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read "John O'Connell".

Dr John O'Connell T.D.  
Minister for Health

## I. ACCESS TO HOSPITAL SERVICES

- You have the right in a medical emergency to be admitted immediately to hospital. In cases other than in an emergency, you will be placed on a waiting list if you cannot be admitted to hospital immediately. If you are on a waiting list and are concerned about your condition, you should consult your family doctor who can then request that your condition be reviewed by your hospital consultant.
- Where a recommended medical procedure is not available at the hospital, you will have the right to ask your hospital consultant to transfer you elsewhere where the procedure is available.
- You have the right, should your admission be cancelled by the hospital, to receive adequate and timely notice of such cancellation. However, in exceptional cases arising from emergency pressures or staff illnesses, your operation may have to be cancelled at very short notice. In these circumstances, the hospital will make every effort to contact you in advance.
- You have the right, in the event of cancellation, to be given a new appointment for an early date and to be treated on a priority basis.



In 1991, there were almost 650,000 admissions to hospitals, over 1.12 million attendances at Accident and Emergency Departments and over 1.75 million attendances at Out-Patient Departments.

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## 2. OUT-PATIENT SERVICES

- You have the right, when your family doctor refers you to hospital for an out-patient appointment, to:
  - receive confirmation within a reasonable time of the date of your first appointment;
  - be given an individual appointment time;
  - be seen by a consultant or senior doctor on your first appointment.

If you feel your condition has disimproved, you should consult your family doctor who can, if necessary, take up the matter with the hospital.



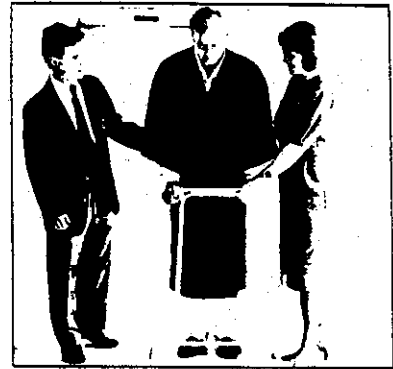
- You have the right, should your appointment at an out-patient department be cancelled by the hospital, to receive adequate and timely notice of such cancellation and to be given a new appointment on a priority basis.

You can help to reduce delays at Out-Patient Departments by attending punctually for your appointment or by notifying the hospital as soon as possible if you find you will be unable to attend.

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### 3. COURTESY

- You have the right to be treated in a courteous manner at all times by *every* member of the hospital staff.



### 4. VISITING ARRANGEMENTS

- You have the right to receive visits from your relatives and friends, including children. The hospital must ensure that visiting arrangements are flexible, consistent with the nature of your illness and the needs of other patients.



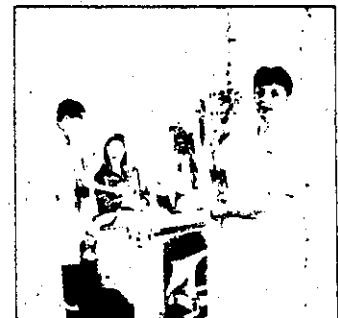
### 5. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

- You have the right to be treated with respect for your religious and philosophical beliefs.



### 6. PRIVACY

- You have the right to have your privacy respected, especially when the nature of your clinical condition is being discussed with you or your relatives by hospital staff.



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## 7. INFORMATION CONCERNING YOUR TREATMENT

- You have the right to be informed of the name of the consultant under whose care you are being placed, and, if you are to be referred to another consultant, you have the right to be informed of the reasons for such referral.
- You have the right to be informed of the nature of your illness or condition in language which you can fully understand, and to be informed concerning:
  - the results of your tests and x-rays;
  - the purpose, method, likely duration and expected benefit of the proposed treatment;
  - alternative forms of treatment;
  - possible pain or discomfort, risks and side-effects of the proposed treatment.

## 8. CONSENT TO TREATMENT

Generally, treatment should only be given to a patient with his or her informed consent or, in the case of a child, the consent of a parent or guardian. You may request the presence of a person or persons of your choosing during the procedure for granting consent. The consent form you are asked to sign should clearly state the nature of the procedures to be undertaken.

Only in cases where a patient lacks the capacity to give or withhold consent, and where a qualified medical doctor determines that treatment is urgently necessary in order to prevent immediate or imminent harm, may treatment be given without informed consent.

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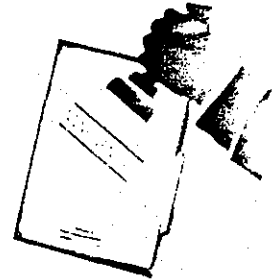




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## 9. CONFIDENTIALITY

- You have the right to total confidentiality in respect of your medical records.
- You have the right to request the hospital to make details of your relevant medical records available to you. Hospitals will normally meet your wishes in this regard, except where it would be considered that this would cause serious harm to your physical or mental health. In such circumstances, the information may be communicated through a health professional, normally your family doctor.



## 10. TEACHING AND RESEARCH

- You have the right to refuse to participate in the teaching of medical students by your consultant. Your permission must be sought before a consultant can involve you in the teaching of students. However, your co-operation would be important in view of the need to ensure that future doctors obtain the best possible training.
- You have the right to refuse to take part in any clinical trials or research concerning the use of new drugs or medical devices. Clinical trials and experimental treatment should *never* be carried out without your informed consent being obtained by the hospital or medical personnel.



## 11. DISCHARGE

- You have the right on your discharge from hospital to have yourself and your family doctor informed of the nature of your condition, the treatment you received while in hospital, the medication required by you, and the arrangements for any further attendance at the hospital.



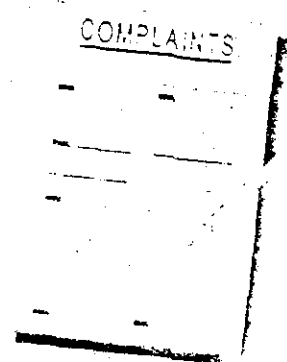
## 12. COMPLAINTS

- You have the right to complain about any aspect of hospital service, to have the complaint investigated, and to be informed of the outcome as soon as possible.

Your hospital has detailed complaint procedures in place and should publicise these prominently throughout the hospital, together with the name and telephone number of the hospital's designated Complaints Officer.

- You have the right, where your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, to have the matter referred to the hospital's Complaints Committee.

The hospital's complaints procedures are without prejudice to your statutory rights to complain to the Ombudsman, the Medical Council, or An Bord Altranais (The Nursing Board).



In the application of this Charter, special consideration should always be given to the particular needs of children, expectant mothers, the elderly and persons with a physical or mental disability.